Chapter 1

Introduction

OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a brief historical perspective on the evolution of document types and introduces a new document paradigm that has emerged with digitization. It reviews the role of documents in the overall context of today’s business world.

The review then covers the contributions made by various disciplines to our understanding of the evolution of DMS and the emergence of solutions for managing content of documents, particularly for Web presentation. This chapter also introduces the benefits of an integrative approach to document and Web content management solutions.

Our objectives are to:

- Provide some historical background and show its influence on contemporary approaches to document management.
- Examine the way a “document” is presently understood and how this may vary according to disciplinary background.
- Review technological developments that have impacted on the evolution of document formats and methods of registering documents.
- Review the development of DMS and show how the consideration of systems for managing documents and their content has been heavily influenced by the emergence of digital documents.
- Consider the emergence of Content Management Systems (CMS) within the overall evolutionary development of document technologies.
- Introduce an integrative approach to planning and implementing solutions for document and Web content management, depicted in an IDCM planning model.
- Cover the high-level features of the IDCM model, which comprises a management framework and conceptual systems architecture.
THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTS AND REGISTERS

Antiquity

Our glimpses through the mists of antiquity tell us that after humanity developed writing, we found a need to systematize what had been written. Prior to the evolution of writing, our ancestors relied upon the individual and collective memories of tribal communities, in the form of genealogies, myths, and legends, embodied within poetry and songs, to recall and share information about past important events and the deeds of famous people. The earliest “documents” recording memories are the depictions fading on rock and cave walls in various parts of the world.

From at least two millennia prior to the common era (BCE), documents were created on a variety of media as far afield as Sumer, Egypt, and China. Most notably, the media of documentation were the clay tablet or papyrus. However, there were many alternatives, such as inscribed bones and tortoise shells, some Chinese examples of which have remained in existence for over 3000 years.

The organization of such documents was developed in order to maintain effective custody of records in courts and temples. For example, records were kept of court appointments, proclamations, military campaigns, and exchanges of goods. These archives were used to support management of labor provision for military campaigns and public works as well as levying taxes. Perhaps if the illiterate masses had been aware of their existence, they may have regarded them as a tyrannical instrument of the state, maintained by bureaucrats, or scribes, as they then were.

Those who recognized the power of organized document collections posed more of a threat. For example, the emperor Ch’in who unified the Chinese feudal states in 221 BCE, ordered destruction of many documents in order to try to standardize writing and measurements styles, and to stymie subversive thought.

Augustus Caesar, on having assumed the office of Pontifex Maximus (chief priest) in ancient Rome, is recorded as having selectively culled documents that may have contained views contrary to his own political aspirations.

It is evident that the destruction of records by Roman emperors may not always have been to the public detriment, as is evidenced by the actions of Emperor Adrianus (Hadrian) in canceling Treasury debts:

Hadrian canceled a countless sum of money owed to the fisc (Treasury) by private debtors in Rome and Italy, and also vast sums of arrears in the provinces, and he burned the records of indebtedness in the Forum of the deified Trajan in order to strengthen the general sense of security.

His actions may have strengthened a general sense of security, but no doubt, they also bolstered the emperor’s popularity during quite a volatile period. A contemporary example would be a President or Prime Minister canceling our obligations to the taxation collectors. Heads of government please take note — Hadrian’s strategy left a lasting impression — a relief struck in honor of Hadrian’s actions is available for public viewing in the Roman Forum to this day.
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